

# The Gadsden Times

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 1, 1995 • \$1.25

## Gadsden Minutemen growing in prominence



In the photograph above, a Gadsden Minuteman who called himself Gene, instructs 10-year-old Scott in the use of a rifle during activities in Glencoe during the summer. In the photograph at right, the man on the right, who would not give his name, fires an assault weapon while John Landrum, foreground, takes aim with a 9mm handgun.



By Donna Maltbie  
Times Staff Writer

The Gadsden Minutemen militia group got its start this way many free puppies have found good homes — with an ad in the classified section of a newspaper.

Co-founder Mike Kemp said in the spring of 1994 he took an ad in the "guns for sale" section of *The Gadsden Times* classifieds asking anyone interested in forming a militia to write to a post office box.

"I had reached a boiling point concerning governmental abuse and governmental arrogance," he said. Kemp said he thought a militia would be a way to address it.

He said he got three responses, one from a man he hasn't heard from since. Another came from a local man who went on, Kemp said, to form his own underground group.

The third response came from Jeff Randall. The rest of the story, Kemp said, is a fairly open book.

Newspaper stories about the group appeared in December 1994, and other media attention followed. In January, the group had a meeting at Elliott Community Center for anyone interested. About 50 people attended.

The next week, Kemp spoke to members of the Mid-Morning Kiwanis Club. Kemp said the organization has about 500 people on its mailing list, but he did not disclose its number of members.

Media Bypass, a magazine that militia members distributed at a recent press conference and which featured the Gadsden Minutemen on the cover, identified the group as the third largest militia in the country.

Some of the group members' names, faces and philosophies have become known far beyond their namesake city.

The bombing of a federal building in Oklahoma City in April brought militia organizations to the media forefront, when implications were made that suspects were, if not militia members, militia wannabes.

While militia groups all over the country were put on the defensive to some degree, the Gadsden Minutemen soon



A patch worn on the shoulder of a uniform identifies a member of the Gadsden Minutemen.



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— Mike Kemp

## Kemp

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went on the attack, public relations-wise.

In May, Randall said he infiltrated the "Good O' Boys Roundup," an annual gathering of law enforcement officers in Ocotee, Tenn. The photos Randall took there, along with a videotape made at the 1990 roundup, were made public a couple of months later in the Washington Times, with detailed accounts of alleged racist activities occurring at the roundup.

The resulting attention to the roundup led to a Justice Department investigation and a congressional probe of the matter.

"That's what sets us apart from other militia groups," Kemp said. "We've gone proactive."

So far, Kemp said, the only action he's seen taken after the roundup expose is an attempt to "discredit the messenger" and "threats" from the Justice Department if the militia group does not turn over the original 1990 videotape.

Kemp said he believes it is the government's quest to get that original tape that led to a raid on his house.

On Sept. 8, Kemp was arrested by officers from the Etowah County Drug/Major Crimes Task Force and the Alabama Bureau of Investigation's Narcotics Division on a charge of first-degree possession of marijuana, after what Kemp said was an "unwarranted raid" on his Lookout Street residence.

Officers seized not only potted marijuana plants, but more than 25 guns and Kemp's computer. He said a motion has been filed asking for the return of his property, but he has heard no response.

Kemp said officers also took a copy of the "Good O' Boys Roundup" tape. He said he doesn't know which government agency called for it, but he is certain the tape is what brought officers to his house.

Officers said they received a tip that Kemp was growing marijuana and flew over his house in a helicopter and spotted the plants. They admitted apprehension, because Kemp had indicated in the past he would defend his home from law enforcement officers.

He was arrested without incident.

Kemp said he believes the officers' intention was to catch him armed, so they could shoot him and shut him up.

A short time before Kemp was arrested, Randall had announced his resignation from the Minutemen to pursue other things and escape the public

attention. After Kemp was arrested, Randall called a press conference to announce his return.

Since the arrest, Randall and Kemp have spoken out about alleged corruption in the sheriff's department. Both say the sheriff's department was under investigation before officers came to Kemp's house.

Etowah County Sheriff James Hayes said he heard no criticism of the department until after Kemp was arrested.

Hayes said he met with members of the militia group some time ago. He said he does not agree with many of their ideas. He said that in a newsletter the Minutemen even voiced support for local sheriffs, who are elected by the people to enforce the law.

Their change of views since Kemp's arrest, he said, is an attempt to get away from the issue.

The arrest may have harmed the Minutemen's image in some quarters, Kemp said, but it has infuriated some people.

"The (Oklahoma City) bombing scared off some people," he said, "but it brought others out."

Kemp said the Minutemen have "actively and specifically declared war" on government agencies that overstep their bounds.

For the militia members, those bounds are defined by the U.S. Constitution alone, he said.

"When a referee marks off 10 yards for a penalty," Kemp said, "he's doing it because the rule book says to, not because of what some other referee did last week."

"The Constitution is the rule book," he said.

Kemp said the government should fear the people via the ballot box, rather than the people living in fear of the government.

There is no shortage of constitutional issues, he said, to motivate the militia. He questions taxation, gun laws and drug laws, and he says the media is not doing its duty as a watchdog of government agencies.

"We are actively in search of governmental abuses. That is the type fear we want the government to have of people," Kemp said. "There is really nothing sinister about the Gadsden Minutemen or any of our associates."

Kemp has openly discussed his ideology and that of the militia for months, and openly questioned the government's illegalization of the hemp plant, more commonly known now as marijuana.

"I'm not asking for anyone's blessing for what I do in my own home,"

Kemp said. "There's no one on earth complaining about what I do, or about anything I've done to them."

"If I'm not bothering someone, leave me alone," he said. "I stand on the Bible. The Lord put hemp here. Who's to say I can't use it?"

"But it's not hemp any more. It's marijuana. It's the devil's weed," he said.

Kemp indicated his arrest is like Br'er Rabbit being thrown into the briar patch.

"They've got a medical marijuana fight on their hands now," he said. "That's something they never counted on."

Kemp said he grows and smokes "hemp" to ease effects of his physical condition, which requires him to take insulin and other medications. He said he is a diabetic, has epilepsy and suffers partial paralysis.

He said he hopes his defense of the charge is successful, because the alternative will be dying in prison.

"My health purely won't tolerate it," Kemp said.

He said he plans to stand up for himself in court.

"The Constitution spells out my right for a legal adviser of my choosing," Kemp said. "It says nothing about having some mercenary to stand in my

stead who belongs to the same club as

the judge and the prosecutor."

Kemp said he will have legal advice, which was offered to him without solicitation.

He said he stands a better chance of having a "fully informed jury" by being his own spokesman in court.

To the legal system, he said, fully informing a jury is jury tampering.

"I can't be disbarred," Kemp said. "I can get up before a jury and say the words 'fully informed jury' and I can't be disbarred or held in contempt."

Some militia groups speak more of violent action than the Minutemen, Kemp said.

For the Federal Bureau of Investigation, as long as the group is not threatening violence, it is not a problem.

"We don't initiate any investigations unless (a group) is advocating violence against the United States or an individual or a group of individuals," said Jimmie Brown, spokesman for the Birmingham office of the FBI.

He said the Minutemen have been vocal in the past couple of years, but usually a group's comments give an indication of whether they are potentially violent.

"As long as they are just exercising their freedom of speech," Brown said, there is no legal conflict.